

94-270 COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS AND ELECTION PRACTICES

Chapter 1: PROCEDURES

SUMMARY: This Chapter describes the nature and operation of the Commission, and establishes procedures by which the Commission's actions will be governed.

SECTION 1. ORGANIZATION

1. Commission. The Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices is an independent agency of the State, consisting of five (5) members appointed by the Governor, subject to review by the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over legal affairs and confirmation by the Legislature in accordance with Title 1, section 1002, subsection 1. The Commission members will elect one member to serve as Chair for at least a 2- year term. Except for the Chair, the members of the Commission have no individual authority.
2. Office.
 - A. The Commission employs such staff as may be authorized by the Legislature. A Director supervises the staff and is responsible for all day-to-day operations. In the interim between Commission meetings, the Director reports to the Chair, who acts on behalf of the Commission on certain administrative matters. The Commission's offices are located in the State Office Building, where any filing or written submission may be made between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on any day when state government offices are open, except that filings by facsimile or electronic means, where otherwise permitted by rule, may be transmitted at any time. The office has a mailing address of 135 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333.
 - B. All records of the Commission are maintained in these offices, where they are available for inspection or copying, except as particular records are made confidential by law. The cost of copying Commission documents is set by the Director of the Commission, subject to reasonable limitations and approval of the Commission.
 - C. During any period when the position of Director is vacant, the Chair of the Commission will appoint an acting Director.

SECTION 2. MEETINGS

1. Regular Meetings. The Commission will meet at least four times during the course of any year in which a general election is held, and at least twice during every other year. A tentative schedule of meetings for each calendar year will be adopted at the first meeting in each year. A meeting will be held as early as possible after the appointment of (a) new commission member(s) in each even-numbered year to select a Chair.
2. Special Meetings. The Commission may meet at any time at the call of the Secretary of State, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairman of the Commission, or a majority of its members. Each member of the Commission must have at least 24 hours notice of the time, place and purpose of the meeting. If written notice is not feasible, telephone notice satisfies the foregoing requirement.
3. Agenda. The Director will prepare a written agenda for each meeting of the Commission. The agenda will contain items of business to be considered, staff findings and recommendations, and will include the date, time and location of the meeting. When possible, the agenda will be mailed to each Commission member at least 7 days before the meeting.
4. Notice. In addition to the public notice required by the public meetings law, 1 M.R.S.A. Section 406, notice of Commission meetings will be given to those directly involved or affected by matters pending before the Commission, as follows:
 - A. Legislative Ethics. When a properly filed request or referral is made for an advisory opinion on a question of legislative ethics, notice that the matter has been placed on the agenda for a Commission meeting will be given by mail to the Legislator whose circumstances or conduct is at issue, or to the Presiding Officer of either House referring the inquiry. When a complaint alleging a violation of the laws on legislative ethics is filed, the Legislator will be informed promptly of the nature of the allegations and the existence of any investigation by the Commission. Notice that the matter has been placed on the agenda for a Commission hearing will be given by certified mail to both the Legislator and the complainant not less than 10 days before the date set for a hearing.
 - B. Campaign Reports and Finances Law; Lobbyist Disclosure Law. Notice of the Commission's consideration of any noncompliance with the requirements of the Campaign Reports and Finances Law

or Lobbyist Disclosure Law will be provided to any person or organization alleged to have committed a violation and to any person who has officially requested a Commission investigation or determination.

C. Other Matters.

- (1) With respect to any other matter presented to the Commission, notice will be given to the person or organization whose conduct is at issue, and to any complainant, except as provided in Section 3, subsection 1, paragraph B of these rules.
- (2) The notice will include the date, time, and location of the Commission meeting. If mail notice of a meeting is not feasible, the staff will make best efforts to give oral notice to Commission members or to those entitled to notice under this provision.

5. Public Meetings. All meetings, hearings or sessions of the Commission will be open to the general public unless, by an affirmative vote of at least 3 members, the Commission requires the exclusion of the public, pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. Section 1005 or 1 M.R.S.A. Section 1013(3).
6. Quorum. Every decision of the Commission must be made at a meeting at which at least 3 members of the Commission are present and voting. At least 2 members must be present for the conduct of a public hearing before the Commission. If fewer than 3 members are present for a hearing, however, objections to rulings of the presiding officer concerning the conduct of the hearing must be preserved until a meeting of the Commission at which a quorum is present.
7. Minutes.
 - A. The Director will prepare minutes of each business meeting of the Commission. These minutes will be the official record of Commission meetings, and will accurately record all matters considered.
 - B. The minutes will record any executive session of the Commission and its subject matter, but will not report the proceedings of the executive session. Likewise, minutes will not be taken of any public hearing held by the Commission, since hearings are separately recorded.

SECTION 3. INITIATION OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Legislative Ethics. The Commission is authorized to investigate and make advisory recommendations to either House of the Maine Legislature concerning legislative conflicts of interest or any breach of the legislative ethics set forth in 1 M.R.S.A. Sections 1001 - 1023. The Commission's opinion may be sought by three methods, or the Commission may act on its own motion.
 - A. Legislator's Own Conduct.
 - (1) A Legislator seeking an advisory opinion with respect to his or her own circumstances or conduct should make a written request for an opinion, setting forth the pertinent facts with respect to the legislative matter at issue and the circumstances of the Legislator giving rise to the inquiry.
 - (2) The request will be officially filed only when received at the offices of the Commission. The Director will promptly send a copy of the request to the Chair, and the matter will be placed on the agenda for the next Commission meeting, or if necessary, at a special meeting.
 - (3) An oral request by a Legislator for an opinion with respect to his or her own circumstances will not be considered an official request for an advisory opinion, and a Legislator making such a request will be so notified, by letter, and encouraged to file a written request.
 - B. Complaints. Any written complaint will be included in the agenda of the next Commission meeting.
 - (1) Complaint by a Legislator. Copies of any sworn complaint filed by a Legislator will promptly be sent to the Legislator against whom the complaint has been lodged and to the Commission Chair, in each case identifying the Legislator making the complaint. A complaint invokes the Commission's authority only if made under oath and only if it addresses an alleged conflict of interest relating to circumstances arising during the term of the legislature then in office.

(2) Other Complaints.

- (a) The Director will review each complaint to determine whether the matter relates to the Commission's statutory mandate. When a complaint is filed, the Director, in consultation with Commission Counsel, will review the matter to determine whether the complaint has sufficient merit to warrant recommending the calling of a meeting. When a meeting is called, the Commission will determine in executive session whether to hear the complaint. If the nature of the complaint clearly does not fall within the scope of the Commission's jurisdiction, the Director will so notify the complainant by letter within 14 days of receiving the complaint. In such cases, the respondent need not be notified. The Commission may reverse any administrative decision.
- (b) An oral complaint by any person alleging a conflict of interest concerning any legislator does not constitute a complaint under 1 M.R.S.A. Section 1013(2)(B), and a person registering such a complaint will be so notified, by letter.

- C. Referral by Presiding Officer. When a Legislator has requested an advisory opinion from the Presiding Officer of the House of which he/she is a member, and the Presiding Officer has referred the inquiry directly to the Commission, the Director will arrange a meeting of the Commission as soon as possible to consider the question.

2. Election Campaign Reporting.

- A. Report Review. The Commission staff will review all filings made pursuant to 21-A M.R.S.A. Sections 1001 - 1062 to ascertain any apparent violations of the filing requirements set by statute or rule. Reports and registrations will be checked for violations against a standardized checklist. Notice of any omission, error, or violation will be given by mail to the filer and a copy of the notice and any other communication made to or from the filer relating to the problem(s) will be placed in the filer's record. The notice will include a request that the filer remedy any omission or error within 15 days of the date of the notice. If the filer fails to respond within that time frame, the Commission staff may contact the filer to establish a reasonable grace period within which the filer must

comply. If the filer does not rectify the problem, the matter will be placed on the agenda of the next Commission meeting, along with all documents relating to the case. Additionally, any apparent occurrences of substantial nonconformance with the requirements of the law will be placed on the agenda of the next meeting, including, but not limited to, the following:

- (1) Failure to properly sign a required report,
- (2) Failure to file a required report or registration,
- (3) Late filing of a required report or registration outside the grace period,
- (4) Failure to disclose contributions received or expenditures made of more than \$500 in the aggregate on reports due after the 12th day before an election, or
- (5) Exceeding contribution limitations. For the purposes of the limitations imposed by 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1015(1), 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1015(2), 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1015(3), and 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1056, the following guidelines shall apply:
 - (a) All contributions made to a candidate through the day of the primary election for which the candidate seeks office are deemed to be made in the primary election.
 - (b) Notwithstanding division (c) below, if a candidate loses in the primary, all contributions made to that candidate for the purpose of liquidating debts and liabilities associated with the candidate's candidacy are deemed to be made in the primary election.
 - (c) All contributions made to a candidate from the day after the primary election through the date of the general election for which the candidate seeks office are deemed to be made in the general election.
 - (d) Notwithstanding division (e) below, all contributions made after the general election to a general election candidate for the purpose of reducing debts and liabilities associated with the candidate's candidacy are deemed to be made in the general election.

- (e) All contributions made after the day of the general election to a candidate who has liquidated all debts and liabilities associated with that election are deemed to be made in support of the candidate's candidacy for a subsequent election.
 - (6) Divisions (a) through (e) above shall apply to any write-in candidate who has qualified under 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 723, or who has received contributions or made expenditures with the intent of qualifying as a candidate.
- B. The Commission will determine whether a report substantially conforms to the requirements of the law. At each meeting, the Director will submit a summary of all cases resolved administratively. The Commission may reverse any administrative decision.
- C. Late Reports and Registrations. Where required by statute, notice of failure to file a required report will be timely sent by Commission staff. When a report or registration is filed late, the Director's recommendations will be based on the following considerations:
 - (1) Lateness of report or registration,
 - (2) Reason for lateness,
 - (3) Kind of report (more stringent application for pre-election reports),
 - (4) Amount of campaign funds not properly reported,
 - (5) Previous record of the filer, and
 - (6) Good faith effort of the filer to remedy the matter.
- D. Reports of noncompliance with the provisions of the campaign registration and reporting laws that may come to the attention of the Commission staff from any source other than review of the reports filed will be reported to the Commission Chair. Any person (as defined in 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1001) may make an official request for a Commission investigation or determination by filing a written request at the Commission's office, setting forth such facts as are necessary to specify the alleged violation. A copy of any such written request will be promptly mailed to the Commission Chair as well as to the candidate or organization alleged to have

violated the statutory requirements. An official request will be placed on the agenda of the next Commission meeting.

- E. An oral report of a violation, or a written request containing insufficient detail to specify the violation charged, does not constitute an official request for a Commission determination, and a person registering such a complaint will be so notified. The Director will list any oral report of a violation, or insufficient written report, on the agenda of the Commission's next meeting, but no action will be taken except upon the Commission's initiative. The person alleged to have committed a violation will be notified of the Commission meeting.

3. Lobbyist Disclosure Procedures.

- A. **Report Review.** The Commission staff will monitor all filings made pursuant to 3 M.R.S.A. Section 311 et seq. for timeliness, legibility, and completeness. The staff will send the lobbyist a notice of any apparent reporting deficiency, including failure to use prescribed forms. The notice will include a request that the deficiency be corrected within 15 business days of the notice. If remedy is not made, it will be noted on the agenda of the next Commission meeting. The Commission may reject reports that are incomplete or illegible.
- B. **Late Registrations and Reports.** Notice will be given by mail to any lobbyist whose registration, monthly disclosure report, or annual report is delinquent. In the case of a late monthly report, the notice must be mailed within 7 business days following the filing deadline for the report. In the case of late annual reports and registrations, the notice must be mailed within 15 business days following the filing deadline. The notice must include a statement specifying the amount assessed. A penalty of \$100 will be assessed the lobbyist for every month that a monthly disclosure report is late and a penalty of \$200 will be assessed the lobbyist and employer for every month a registration or annual report is filed late. For purposes of 3 M.R.S.A. Section 319(1), the month will end on the 15th day of the month following the month in which a report was due. Any failure to submit a required report, registration, or penalty fee will be noted on the Commission agenda.
- C. **Suspensions.** The Commission may suspend any person from lobbying who fails to file a required report or pay an assessed fee. A notice of the suspension must be mailed to the lobbyist by U.S. Certified Mail within three days following the suspension.

Reinstatement will occur on the date the required report or payment is received in the Commission office. A notice of the reinstatement must be mailed to the lobbyist by U.S. Certified Mail or given directly to the lobbyist within three days following receipt of the required report or payment.

- D. Request for Penalty Waiver. A lobbyist may request a waiver of any late penalty the lobbyist incurs. The request must be made in writing to the Commission and must state the reason for the delinquency. Any such request must be noted on the agenda of the next Commission meeting. Only the Commission may grant penalty waivers.

- E. Request for Waiver of Nonsession Reporting Requirement. A lobbyist may request a waiver of the monthly nonsession reporting requirement set forth in 3 M.R.S.A. Section 317(4) if the lobbyist does not expect to be engaged in lobbying when the Legislature is not in session. The Director is authorized to provisionally grant such waivers pending approval by the Commission. Provisional waivers may be granted only where a request is properly filed, the statement properly completed, and where there is no apparent reason to doubt the statement is true. During the period in which the waiver is effective, reports will not be required. If lobbying is resumed during the period for which the waiver was granted, the lobbyist must file a monthly disclosure report for the month or months lobbying was conducted.

- F. Faxing Duly Executed Lobbyist Registration, Reports. Any registration or report required by 3 M.R.S.A. ch. 15 may be provisionally filed by transmission of a facsimile copy of the duly executed report to the Commission, provided that the original of the same report is received by the Commission within 5 calendar days thereafter.

SECTION 4. FACT FINDING AND INVESTIGATIONS

- 1. Before Commission Meeting. With respect to any inquiry, report or request for Commission action properly filed in accordance with the preceding section, the Director may conduct such preliminary fact finding as is deemed prudent and desirable. When the Director and Counsel find a basis for a preliminary investigation, they will recommend such steps to the Chair as necessary. Pursuant to reviewing reports or finding of fact, the Director, in consultation with Counsel, will prepare a summary of findings and recommendations for inclusion on the agenda. The Chair is

authorized to issue subpoenas in the name of the Commission to compel the attendance of witnesses or the production of records, documents or other evidence when the Chair and the Commission's Counsel are in agreement that the testimony or evidence sought by the subpoena is likely to be of critical importance to disposition of the matter; and to issue any subpoena in the name of the Commission on behalf of any person having a statutory right to an agency subpoena. Any oral testimony compelled by a subpoena issued by this provision will be presented initially and exclusively to the Commission.

2. By the Commission. Once any matter is reached on the agenda of a Commission meeting, the Commission will control any further investigation or proceedings. No hearings will be held except by direction of the Commission. On a case-by-case basis, the Commission may authorize its Chair, Director, or any ad hoc committee of its members, to conduct further investigative proceedings on behalf of the Commission between Commission meetings. Any authorization so conferred will be fully reflected in the minutes of the Commission meeting.

SECTION 5. CONTENT OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTS

The following clarifies the requirements set forth in 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1017(5) and 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1060(4):

1. Expenditures By Consultants, Employees, and Other Agents of a Political Campaign. Expenditures made on behalf of a candidate, political committee, or political action committee by any person, agency, firm, organization, etc. employed or retained for the purpose of organizing, directing, managing or assisting the candidate, the candidate's committee, or the political action committee shall be deemed expenditures by the candidate or committee. Such expenditures must be reported by the candidate or committee as if made or incurred by the candidate or committee directly.
2. Expenditures By Political Action Committees. In addition to the requirements set forth in 21-A M.R.S.A. Section 1060(4), the reports must contain the purpose of each expenditure and the name of each payee and creditor.

SECTION 6. PROHIBITED COMMUNICATIONS

Commission members shall not discuss any specific case under investigation, or any case which may reasonably be expected to be the subject of investigation,

as long as the matter is pending before the Commission and, where applicable, until anybody to whom the Commission renders an advisory opinion has concluded its action and any appeals therefrom have been exhausted.

SECTION 7. ACCELERATED REPORTING SCHEDULE

1. General. In addition to other reports required by law, any candidate for Governor, State Senator or State Representative who is not certified as a Maine Clean Election Act candidate under Title 21-A, section 1121 et seq., and who has a certified candidate as an opponent in an election must comply with the following reporting requirements on forms prescribed, prepared, and provided by the Commission.

INFORMATIONAL NOTE: Title 21-A, section 1017 prescribes reporting requirements for candidates.

2. 101% Report. Any candidate subject to this section, who receives, spends or obligates more than 1% in excess of the primary or general election distribution amounts for a Maine Clean Election Act candidate opponent in the same race, must file with the Commission, within 48 hours of such receipt, expenditure, or obligation, a report detailing the candidate's total campaign contributions, receipts, expenditures and obligations to date. The Commission will notify all candidates who have an opposing certified candidate of the applicable distribution amounts and of the 101% Report requirement.
3. 21-Day Report. Any candidate who has filed a 101% report must file an updated report with the Commission not later than 5 p.m. on the 21st day before the date on which an election is held. The report must be complete as of the 23rd day before the date of that election.
4. 12-Day Report. Any candidate who has filed a 101% report must file an updated report with the Commission not later than 5 p.m. on the 12th day before the date on which an election is held. The report must be complete as of the 14th day before the date of that election.
5. 48- Hour Report. Any candidate who has filed a 101% report must file an updated report with the Commission reporting single expenditures of \$1,000 or more by candidates for Governor, \$750 by candidates for State Senator, and \$500 by candidates for State Representative made after the 12th day before any election and more than 48 hours before 5 p.m. on the date of that election. The report must be submitted to the Commission within 48 hours of those expenditures, or by noon of the first business day after the expenditure, whichever is later.

6. Filing by Facsimile or Electronic Means. For purposes of this section, reports may be filed by facsimile or by other electronic means acceptable to the Commission, and such reports will be deemed filed when received by the Commission provided that the original of the same report is received by the Commission within 5 calendar days thereafter.

SECTION 8. REPORTS OF INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES

1. General. Any person, party committee, political committee or political action committee that makes an independent expenditure aggregating in excess of \$50 in an election must file a report with the Commission according to this section.
2. Definitions. For purposes of this section, the following phrases are defined as follows:
 - A. "Clearly identified," with respect to a candidate, has the same meaning as in Title 21-A, chapter 13, subchapter II.
 - B. "Expressly advocate" means any communication that uses phrases such as "vote for the Governor," "reelect your Representative," "support the Democratic nominee," "cast your ballot for the Republican challenger for Senate District 1," "Jones for House of Representatives," "Jean Smith in 2002," "vote Pro-Life" or "vote Pro-Choice" accompanied by a listing of clearly identified candidates described as Pro-Life or Pro-Choice, "vote against Old Woody," "defeat" accompanied by a picture of one or more candidate(s), "reject the incumbent," or communications of campaign slogan(s) or individual word(s), which in context can have no other reasonable meaning than to urge the election or defeat of one or more clearly identified candidate(s), such as posters, bumper stickers, advertisements, etc. which say "Pick Berry," "Harris in 2000," "Murphy/Stevens" or "Canavan!"
 - C. "Independent expenditure" has the same meaning as in Title 21-A, section 1019. Any expenditure made by any person in cooperation, consultation or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate, a candidate's political committee or their agents is considered to be a contribution to that candidate and is not an independent expenditure.
3. Reporting Schedules. Independent expenditures must be reported to the Commission in accordance with the following provisions:

- A. Independent expenditures aggregating in excess of \$50 but not in excess of \$250 made by any person, party committee, political committee or political action committee must be reported to the Commission in accordance with the reporting schedules for candidates and party committees as provided in Title 21-A M.R.S.A. chapter 13, subchapter II [§§ 1017-1019], and for political action committees as provided in Title 21-A M.R.S.A. chapter 13, subchapter IV [§ 1059].
- B. Independent expenditures aggregating in excess of \$250 made by any person, party committee, political committee or political action committee must be reported to the Commission within 48 hours of those expenditures. Additional reports are required for subsequent increments of independent expenditures aggregating in excess of \$250 within 48 hours of those expenditures.
- C. Reports must contain information as required by Title 21-A, chapter 13, subchapter II (§§ 1016-1017-A), and must clearly identify the candidate and indicate whether the expenditure was made in support of or in opposition to the candidate.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

1 M.R.S.A. § 1002, as amended; 1 M.R.S.A. § 1003; 21-A M.R.S.A. § 1017, subsection 3-B; 21-A M.R.S.A. § 1019, as amended; 21-A M.R.S.A. § 1125, sub-§ 9; 21-A M.R.S.A. § 1126.

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